

Planning Collaboration Initiative Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration

Conference Call Summary for March 12, 2003 Topic: Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Finding

The first round of conference calls for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Planning Collaboration Initiative (PCI) continued on March 12, 2003 with a discussion of the Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Finding. This was the third of 15 conference calls to discuss the drafting of a National Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between FHWA and FTA. Robin Mayhew of FHWA Headquarters and Pete Butler of FTA Region 1 facilitated the discussion. Other members of the PCI Team who participated in the conference call included Jesse Balleza from FTA Region 6 and Vince Valdes from FTA Headquarters. Danyell Diggs and Tony Solury from FHWA Headquarters also participated in the call. Volpe Center staff participation included Cassandra Callaway, Kate Fichter, and Esther Lee.

Representatives from the following field offices participated in this third call:

- FTA Region 1
- FTA Region 4
- FTA Region 5
- FTA Region 7
- FTA Region 9
- FTA Region 10
- FHWA Alabama Division
- FHWA Alaska Division
- FHWA Arizona Division
- FHWA California Division
- FHWA Florida Division
- FHWA Illinois
- FHWA Minnesota
- FHWA Nebraska Division
- FHWA New Jersey Division
- FHWA Pennsylvania
- FHWA Tennessee Division
- FHWA Massachusetts
- FHWA Michigan
- Chicago Metro Office
- Washington, DC Metro Office

This summary provides (1) comments about the PCI outreach process (2) issues about and solutions for metropolitan and statewide planning finding (3) a summary of recommendations, and (4) a listing of other issues that arose during the conversation and should be addressed, but were not immediately relevant to the discussion on Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Finding (*Parking Lot/Bus Stop Issues*).

COMMENTS ABOUT THE PCI OUTREACH PROCESS

During the conference call, the following question was asked and response provided regarding the PCI outreach process:

- Is it important for us (field staff) to submit comments to the PCI website? The response was yes. Comments are eagerly sought, and will be considered when drafting the National MOU.

DISCUSSION OF METROPOLITAN AND STATEWIDE PLANNING FINDING

During the discussion, participants agreed that there are very few contentious issues related to the Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Finding because the planning finding are often closely tied to the STIP Approval process (see notes from March 5, 2003 Conference Call). However, the participants did raise the following four issues:

- A. Multi-Modal Interests
- B. Public Involvement Processes
- C. Signature Authority
- D. Differences Among and Within Regions

A. Multi-Modal Interests

FTA regional offices have limited staff that are responsible for various functions across numerous states. As a result, FTA is often not in attendance or represented at planning meetings. Participants stated that FTA often must rely on FHWA division staff to support their roles in the metropolitan and statewide planning processes. All participants agreed that FHWA has considerably more involvement in metropolitan and statewide planning activities (e.g. FHWA conducts ongoing monitoring and oversight of the planning process). One consequence of this arrangement is that FTA interests may not be fully voiced or considered.

The following recommendation was made to the PCI Team for drafting the National MOU:

- Include language in the National MOU that describes the philosophy of multimodal transportation planning.

Participants also offered staffing and funding recommendations to promote multi-modal transportation planning, including:

- Fund dedicated positions for planning staff in the FTA regional offices.
- Consider creating a Planning Office in the regional offices.
- Create a full-time planner in the FHWA division office who works for both FTA and FHWA.
- Deliver transit-related cross training to FHWA field staff.

B. Public Involvement

Given that FTA staff are not able to be as involved in metropolitan and statewide planning processes as FHWA, FTA participants raised questions and concerns about ensuring effective public involvement in the planning processes. The questions related to the following concerns: 1) public involvement in the statewide process with specific concern for areas outside MPO jurisdictions, 2) documentation of public involvement 3) review of self-certification, 4) recognition of other public involvement activities, and, 5) action plans to engage the public, especially tribal governments.

Currently, FTA verifies effective public involvement by requesting and receiving documentation from FHWA. This documentation often amounts to “reams” of paper.

The following recommendations were made to the PCI Team for drafting the National MOU:

- Post the May 2000 guidance on the PCI website.
- Encourage state and metropolitan partners to agree on how to document public involvement processes.

C. Signature Authority

During the discussion, participants raised questions about who should ‘sign-off’ on the metropolitan and statewide planning finding. Similar to past conference calls, there were different opinions voiced about whether or not FTA should delegate their signature authority to FHWA in order to expedite the process. Another participant questioned whether signature authority on the planning finding needed to rest at the Regional Administrator level, or whether FTA field planners could have authority to sign. One example provided was that FTA field planners used to have signature authority, but that authority now rests with the Regional Administrators.

The following recommendations were made for consideration in the drafting of the National MOU:

- Test pilot a single signature process whereby FHWA can sign for both agencies; participants are eager to know how regional and division offices will be selected for pilot projects.
- Consider the appropriate level of signature authority.

D. Differences Among and Within Regions

FTA participants shared their different approaches for submitting the Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Finding. In addition, participants indicated that within regions FTA may use different approaches to serve their varied member states.

Examples of different approaches include:

1. FTA Region 1 submits the planning finding as part of the STIP Approval.
2. FTA Region 6 submits one-page planning finding on each TIP to each MPO through the state DOT.
3. FTA Region 9 tailors approaches for each of their member states accordingly.

While these tailored practices and opinions were expressed and accepted, some participants offered ideas for establishing National minimum thresholds for service delivery. The following recommendations were made for consideration in the drafting of the National MOU:

- Allow tailored approaches for regional and state service deliver, but consider establishing minimum thresholds.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list restates the recommendations provided in this summary report that relate to UPWP review:

- Include language in the National MOU that describes the philosophy of multimodal transportation planning.
- Fund dedicated positions for planning staff in the FTA regional offices
- Consider creating a Planning Office in the regional offices.
- Create a full-time planner in the FHWA division office who works for both FTA and FHWA.

- Deliver transit-related cross training to FHWA field staff.
- Post the May 2000 guidance on the PCI
- Encourage state and metropolitan partners to agree on how to document public involvement processes.
- Test pilot a single signature process whereby FHWA can sign for both agencies; participants are eager to know how regional and division offices will be selected for pilot projects.
- Consider the appropriate level of signature authority.
- Allow tailored approaches for regional and state service deliver, but consider establishing minimum thresholds.

PARKING LOT/BUS STOP ISSUES

The following issues arose during the conference call and should be addressed, but were not immediately relevant to the discussion of metropolitan and statewide planning finding:

- Participants would like to discuss Air Quality Conformity finding as part of the PCI outreach process.
- Participants would like to know how region and division offices will be selected for pilot projects.